WILLIAM GOLDING : *Lord of the Flies*

UNIT I : THE CONTEXT

1.0 : Objectives
1.1 : Introduction
1.2 : Socio-Cultural perspective
1.3 : The Great Tradition of Fiction
1.4 : Glossary
1.5 : Sample Questions
1.6 : Recommended Reading

1.0 : OBJECTIVES

This unit intends to serve as a general introduction to *Lord of the Flies.* The socio-cultural background needed for contextualizing the text forms the corpus of the unit.

1.1 : INTRODUCTION

Every text is deeply rooted in its time, for the mind of the author is shaped by the way the age responds to the tradition handed down to it and also by the way it adjusts to new views and ideas. The relationship between the text and the time which produces it may be direct or oblique. So a glimpse at the social and intellectual perspective in addition to close reading, helps us understand a text better.

1.2 : SOCIO-CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE

The Second World War had literally a traumatic effect on the entire United Kingdom. This was not only due to the Blitz during 1940-41 but due to the aftermath of the war. Churchill, the Conservative Prime Minister, who led the country to victory, was out as the Labour Party came to power. But very soon the people became disenchanted as the Labour Party too failed to turn the warfare state into a welfare state, that is, to guarantee social justice in the form of free educatin, free health service etc. India wrested independence in 1947 and many other colonies followed suit. With the empirical crunch Britain was no longer 'great'. The British rulers were struggling hard to replace the missionary role of enlightenment with the pragmatic

role of combatting the economic recession which had reached a flash point in England in the late 40s and early 50s.

The people of the time had an acute crisis of identity. There was no well-defined ideology to bank upon. The church was looked upon as a conservative institution retarding progress by distracting public attention from the more serious social problems Victorian morality had its day. Marriage ceased to be a sacred bond and many couples were not waiting for death to part them. Paradoxically enough, those who opposed status quo were also confused, for they were demolishing social icons without having anything worthier to establish.

The cultural stage of the period was a chequered one. The talkies and the television were a novelty. The visitors to the London gallary became as much familiar with the blazing colour of the post-impressionists like Cezanne and Van Gogh as with the Cubist paintings of Picasso and Braque. The Russian composer Stravinsky who had emigrated first to France and then to America struck a deviant note in the world of music.

Contemporary literary field was tossed by currents and cross currents. The anti-romantic plays of Shaw and the social tragedies of Galsworthy which had dominated the English stage in the first three decades of the 20th century were yielding place to the theatre of the absurd which dramatized the chaotic, arbitrary, irrational nature of human existence. The field of poetry in the 20s and the 30s of the 20th century was dominated by the modernists who set aside the sentimentalism of Victorian poetry and wanted to replace the saccharine images of the post-Romantics with hard, realistic images which had earlier been regarded as unfit for poetic expression. The two high priests of modernist poetry were Eliot and Yeats. The former gave expression to urban pessimism in the imagist style and the latter, often regarded as the greatest of the 20th century English poets, highlighted the confusion of the modern man whose shattered world was disappointingly antithetical to his dreams and ideals. It is worth mentioning here that modern poetry because of its allusiveness, technical experimentation and conscious deviation from the romantic poetic convention struck many readers as obscure. Not that poets like Eliot and Auden were worried about the charge of obscurity against their poetry. They rather held that the obscurity of poetry was but a reflection of the complexity of modern civilization. Eliot was of the view that the meaning of poetry would ever elude the uninitiated reader. One may recall in this context the view of Roger Fry who defended literary elitism in the following words : 'in proportion as art becomes purer the number of people to whom it appeals gets less'.

1.3 : THE GREAT TRADITION OF FICTION

A fictitious narrative in prose, the novel is different from the short story not strictly in length or size. The short story, like the one act play, presents a slice of life. It is much more focused than the novel which is rather comprehensive and inclusive like the epic. The genre includes works as varied as the science fiction, the detective novel, exotic tales of adventure called 'romance', even fantasies like *Alice's Adventures in the Wonderland* where the imagination is given free rein. Though a prose narrative, most novels suitably use dialogues which enable the author to give a realistic touch to the characters portrayed. The 'dialogic imagination', according to Mikhail Bakhtin, is typical of the novel. The dialogic form, which is a form of polyphonic discourse, liberates the narrative from the control of the author. Bakhtin claims that the narrator's utterances are 'double voiced'. It contains his accent and also the accent of the voice reported. So the language of a novel expresses a plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousness, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices.

The English novel which emerged as a popular form in the 18th century was largely a product of 'urban imagination'. Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) and *Moll Flanders* (1722), Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* (1740) and *Clarrissa* (1748) and Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones* (1749) were widely circulated among the readers. Richardson's novels read rather dull today for their formulaic morality — their virtue rewarded, vice punished theme. Fielding's works, which portray the complexities of human nature, are artistically more profound. Lawrence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1760-67) warrants the conclusion that contemporary novels were not wholly 'evergreen trees of diabolical knowledge', as alleged by the conservative elderly. Some of these works have true literary merit and deserve critical attention even today.

Sir Walter Scott and Jane Austen are two great novelists of the romantic period. Scott's romances like *Ivanhoe* (1819), are a colourful pageantry of the past. Austen's novels like *Pride and Prejudice,* though written in the closing years of the 18th century, look forward. Austen was content with the world she knew — a world not wide enough. Yet this 'small square (of two inches wide) of ivory' is ivory indeed ! So deep is her understanding of human nature that her characters and their emotions are of timeless significance.

Apart from Emily Bronte, the author of the classic work *Wuthering Heights* (1847), Dickens and Hardy are two great masters of the Victorian novel. Dickens' works, which were not originally considered as part of the 'great tradition' of the

English novel, have the rare distinction of being popularly accepted and critically acclaimed. Manners and morals are the staple of pre-Dickensian novels. In Dickens these yield place to evils — social evils in his early works like *Oliver Twist* and human evils in later works like *Great Expectations.* Dickens' novels shook the Victorian complacency and thus paved the way for various social reforms. Hardy's novels however present the predicament of man who is but a helpless victim of Fate which operates mainly through chance and coincidence. His works like *The Return of the Native* or *Tess of the D'Urbervilles,* though faulted for their incurable pessimism, contain a vision of life, at once realistic and profound.

The post-Freudian English novel is predominantly psychological. Novelists like D.H. Lawrence were interested in fishing out the 'submerged ice-berg of personality'. Lawrence's works like *sons and Lovers* (1913) and *The Rainbow* (1915) show how human action and impulses at the social sphere are governed by the vital instinct of sex. The necessity to explore the unconscious in terms of language led to the invention of new narrative devices, the most important of which is the stream of consciousness technique. The term in psychology signifies the flow of consciousness of the waking mind. In literature it is used about the device of representing unspoken thought without the help of dialogue. Though the seed of this technique of narration may be traced to Sterne's *Tristram Shandy,* Virginia Woolf and James Joyce are its two most successful exponents. Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) and Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) where there is hardly any linear chronotopical progress, are the masterpieces of the stream of consciousness genre. It is to be noted that most modern novelists experiment with the technique of narration, that is with the way a story gets told. 'Showing', the dramatic style of characterization, today is preferred to 'telling' the narrative style. No wonder that the author's privileged access to the text world — be it as an omniscient narrator or an elucidator/commentator — has been considerably reduced in contemporary novels.

In the 30s and 40s of the 20th century, the English novel flourished quantitatively and not qualitatively. A handful of works like Greene's *The Power and the Glory* (1940) and Orwell's *Animal Farm* (1945) are, of course, worthy of mention. The 50s saw a new and vigorous surge in the field and the works of William Golding are the best fruits of this surge.

1.4 : SAMPLE QUESTIONS

1. What was the condition of England in the first half of the 20th century ?
2. Write a brief essay on the thematic and technical aspects of early 20th century English novel.

1.5 : RECOMMENDED READING

Toyne, Anthony : *An English Reader's History of England.*

Allen, Walter : *The English Novel*

Kettle, Arnold : *An Introduction to the English Novel (2 vols)*

1.4 : GLOSSARY

Blitz : Abbreviated form of blitzkrieg, a German word meaning 'lightning war' or 'violent attack.' The word is specially used to refer to the continuous bombardment of London for 76 nights by the German aircraft during the Second World War. Over 15,000 people were killed and more than three million houses were damaged. People were forced to sleep in the tube stations.

Cubism : An abstract style of painting developed by Picasso and Braque in which natural objects are presented as collection of geometric shapes & figures.

The Absurd Theatre : A type of drama which took the European and American stage by storm in the 50s of the 20th century. The writers of absurd drama took their cue from existentialism which highlighted the contingent, tortured and isolated nature of human existence in an irrational, incomprehensible universe where even language is non-communicative. The major exponents of the theatre of the absurd are Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco, Edward Albee and Harold Pinter. The term may be traced to the title of Martin Esslin's book *The Theatre of the Absurd* published in 1961.

UNIT II : THE AUTHOR AND HIS WORKS

2.0 : Objectives
2.1 : Introduction
2.2 : Life
2.3 : Works
2.4 : Theme
2.5 : Glossary
2.6 : Questions
2.7 : Recommended Reading

2.0 : OBJECTIVES

The objective of this unit is to acquaint students with the author and his mindset.

2.1 : INTRODUCTION

Since every creative mind is unique, it has to be understood in the way in differs from the rest. Again, even when the mind develops over the years, there is a continuity of the basic thought pattern as it evolves and matures. A glance at other works by the author as well as at the life often helps us identify the mindset and understand the text better. New criticism insists on 'close reading' of the text alone. But language, the Russian formalists have shown, is a socially constructed discourse system. So, to grasp the significance of a text, it has to be related not only to the various components of the same work but to other works which inter-enrich each other.

2.2 : LIFE

William Golding was born in 1911 when the world, according to Virginia woolf, had changed and when the storms of the First world War were brewing in Europe. His student life was rather uneventful. After graduating from Oxford he first worked in the theatre as an actor and then as a producer. Then he left the theatre and became a school master. Except for a brief while during the Second World War when he had been enlisted as a gunner in the royal Navy, he continued as a teacher till 1961. After his retirement Golding became a full-time writer. He received the Booker Prize in 1980 and was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1983.

When he died in 1993, Golding had already been accepted as 'the most original and imaginatively exciting' among contemporary British novelists.

2.3 : WORKS

Golding's first published work is *Poems* (1935), which, as he later said, he would "rather forget". In an interview with The Statesman in Calcutta in 1987 Golding admitted his "inability" to write true poetry :

> Perhaps a novel with flashes of poetry in it, is something I can write whereas a flash of poetry as it were standing on its own feet — in fact without anything to stand on — I cannot.

In his long career as a writer Golding also wrote three plays, two volumes of essays and one collection of short stories. Though the plays were successfully staged and though the stories in the volume *The Scorpion God* (1971) were well-accepted by the reading public, Golding's literary fame mostly rests on his novels the first of which, *Lord of the Flies,* was published in 1954. His second novel *The Inheritors* (1955), which according to Golding is his "best", rewrites the Wellsian myth about the superiority of the homo sapiens to the Neanderthal man. In Golding's version the triumph of the inheritors is actually the end of innocence and the triumph of evil. In *Pincher Martin* (1956) memories of past crimes flash through the mind of Christopher Martin as he struggles for survival when his ship gets torpedoed. *Free Fall* (1959) is a first person narrative tracing the moral aberration of the protagonist. *The Spire* (1964) is about the construction of a lofty church-spire at the expense of many human lives. Since the tower is a symbol of presumption, not of faith, the higher it rises, the lower sinks the level of moral degradation. *The Pyramid* (1967) opens with a quotation from an Egyptian sage : 'If thou be among people, make for thyself love, the beginnig and end of the heart'. The rest of the novel shows the failure of the personality whose heart is shut off from love. *Darkness Visible* (1979) fictionalizes the conflict between good and evil, "the polarities of redemptive saintliness and destructive malignity, of disinterested love and calculated terrorism". The tension has been captured through a complex web of inter-relationship between Matty whose face has been terribly disfigured by the London Blitz, and Toni-Sophy, the twin-psychopaths whose hearts are black although their faces are clean. Of Golding's last four novels — *The Rites of Passage* (1980), *The Paper Men* (1984), *Close Quarters* (1987) and *Fire Down Below* (1989) — only the first named has the depth and brilliance of his early works. Written in the diary-form, the novel expresses the darker recesses of the self of

Edmund Talbot who, despite his air of moral superiority, did not try to protect a co-passenger when subjected to inhuman torture by the captain of the ship.

"Novelists do not write the book they should, they write the book they can," observed Golding on one occasion. There may be some truth in this remark from the artist's personal point of view. But if understanding of human nature as well as human situation and elegance of narrative style be the yardstick of greatness, Golding deserves a room in the gallery of Dickens and Lawrence.

2.4 : THEME

Even a casual look at the titles of Golding's novels reveals that Golding is obsessed with the idea of innate depravity of man. Beelzebub, Satan's henchman, is the 'Lord of the Flies'. 'Free Fall' implies the loss of paradise and all that it stands for. 'Darkness Visible' allusively reminds one of the darkness of hell in *Paradise Lost* Bk 1. 'The Spire', ironically, is a downward extension. This view that evil is not socially transmitted but inheres human nature is very close to the Christian concept of Original Sin. But Golding's analysis goes beyond the limits of orthodox Christianity. Christianity holds that evil, although co-eternal with good, is always subordinate to good. This is signified by the lightness of Satan's weight as shown on the divine scale in Milton's *Paradise Lost* Bk IV. But Golding thinks that 'evil is more prominent than good' is human nature. He once said :

> I must say anyone who moved through those years without understanding that man produces evil as a bee produces honey, must have been blind or wrong in the head.

In reply to a question on this matter he also held that 'the colour of original good is not as strong as the colour of original evil'.

It has been pointed out that Golding's novels owe a lot to Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* where the preponderance of evil in human nature has been demonstrated through Kurtz's regression into savagery. But the two versions of evil are not strictly identical. In Conrad's work evil flourishes in a situation hostile to human existence. In Golding's novels like *Lord of the Flies* evil is not environment-induced; its presence is felt even in situations free from compulsion and immune to external contaminants.

2.5 : SAMPLE QUESTIONS

1. Write a short essay on the major novels of William Golding.
2. What is golding's abiding concern as a novelist ? How original is his idea ?

2.6 : RECOMMENDED READING

Carey, John (ed) : *William Golding : The Man and His Books*

Kermode, Frank : 'The Novels of William Golding', *International Literary Annual, III* 1961.

2.7 : GLOSSARY

Original Sin : Innate depravity held to be common to all human beings in consequence of the "first disobedience" and the Fall.

New Criticism : A critical approach involving close reading and detailed analysis of the text. It derives from I.A. Richards' theory that poetry uses a special kind a language. W.K. Wimsatt, Cleanth Brooks, R.P. Warren are its chief exponents.

Russian Formalism : A school of literary criticism which originated in Russia in the 1920s. The Formalist critics ignored the human content like ideas and emotions in literature and held that art or technique alone accounts for the greatness and impressiveness of a work of art. The Prague circle of Formalists united formalism with Saussurean linguistics and viewed language as a massive, inter-related structure of discourse.

UNIT - III : *LORD OF THE FLIES* : THE THEME

3.0 : Objectives

3.1 : Introduction

3.2 : The Story

3.3 : The Theme

3.4 : The Ending

3.5 : The Title

3.6 : Glossary

3.7 : Sample Questions

3.8 : Recommended Reading

3.0 : OBJECTIVES

The objective of this unit is to acquaint students with Golding's novel *Lord of the Flies.* The issue of evil lurking in human heart is the main critical focus of this unit.

3.1 : INTRODUCTION

Every text is like an empty tub, to be filled with meaning by the readers. This means that interpretation of every literary text is open-ended, inexhaustible. The richer the text, the wider is the scope for interpretation. Granted that, every text has a 'theme', a central, dominating idea which may be gathered from an analysis of the subject or topic described. This may not reveal all that the text has to offer, nevertheless it takes us to the heart of the matter.

3.2 : THE STORY

The novel which shows how children grow up as vicious adults without contracting vice from the adult world, has been divided into twelve chapters : *The Sound of the Shell, Fire on the Mountain, Huts on the Beach, Painted Faces and Long Hair Beast from Water, Beast from Air, Shadows and Tall Trees, Gift for the Darkness, A View to a Death, The Shell and the Glasses, Castle Rock,* and *Cry of the Hunters.* But the chapters fit broadly into a four-tier structure : The ordered society of the boys, symptoms of savagery lurking in human nature, the social rules which act as bulwark against all vicious urges, and the inevitable outbreak and triumph of evil.

Ordered society : While being evacuated from a country shattered by nuclear warfare, a group of British boys, all minors, accidentally reach an uninhabited island. As the plane that was carrying them caught fire, the pilot released the passenger tube which landed on the island with the boys unhurt. The green island with a blue lagoon has all the charms and attractions of the legendary el dorado. There are fruits in plenty, coconut to quench one's thirst and the tropical warmth where the skin needs no protection. To crown it all, there is no grown-up to dictate them, to impose do's and don'ts as happens in human society : 'Here at last was the imagined but never fully realized place leaping into life' (21). But to secure their life from unforeseen dangers and also to get rescued from the uninhabited island, the children try to get united, organize themselves and thus build up an ordered society based on discipline and rules. Meetings are convened, Ralph is elected leader of the boys, everyone is not allowed to speak at a time, 'Hands up' system is introduced to determine who will speak. The boys decide to raise shelters and to light fire to send smoke signals to ships passing by. Everything thus begins well for the boys in this new, unregimented world of the young.

Potential Savagery : The ordered system thus built up seems to stand the marooned boys in good stead in that remote island, especially when there is no external threat, natural or human. But it is gradually felt that most of the boys are naturally depraved and as such opposed to all rules which bind the civilized society. Jack, an arrogantly authoritative boy insults Piggy as 'Fatty', Ralph makes a slighting reference to his nickname — 'his real name is Piggy', Even the junior most child feels rather amused when Piggy is humiliated : 'A storm of laughter arose and even the tiniest child joined in' (29). Driven by sheer destructive urge, the boys roll down a huge rock destroying the green canopy underneath. Jack flouts the conch-rule — that only the holder of the conch will have the right to speak : 'The conch doesn't count on top of the mountain' (54). He and his followers neglect the fire, leave the shelter unfinished but jumps to the idea of hunting and killing. In order to derive some perverted, malcicious pleasure Roger and Maurice destroy the sand castles of the little children. Most of the boys set aside the toilet rules and file behind Jack who is bent on subverting the system. They even make an assault upon Robert during mock-hunting with all the ferocity of a predatory beast : 'Ralph too was fighting, to get near, to get a handful of that brown, vulnerable flesh. The desire to squeeze and hurt was over-mastering' (142).

The Taboo of the old life : Despite their innate diabolism the boys take time to slide into brutish barbarism. Vestiges of acquired rules reduce the speed of their degeneration. Ralph apologizes to Piggy for leaking out his nickname. After

destroying the sandcastle of the little boys, Maurice feels 'the unease of wrong doing'. While pelting Henry with stones, Roger deliberately misses his target : yet there was a space round Henry, perhaps six yards in diameter, into which he dare not throw. Here, invisible yet strong was the taboo of the old life .... Roger's arm was conditioned by a civilization that knew nothing of him and was in ruins' (78). Even Jack apoligizes to Ralph for neglecting the fire. Though he is blood-thirsty from the beginning, he cannot kill a pig on the first occasion. He no doubt raises his knife, but cannot stab the animal 'because of the enormity of the knife descending and cutting into living flesh ; because of the unbearable blood' (41). Social and behavioural rules thus act as deterrent and inhibit the paroxysm of savagery.

The Triumph of EVil : But evil is so deep-rooted in human nature that although its outburst may be retarded temporarily, it cannot be ultimately checked. Simon, the only boy who identifies the terrific beast as the dead parachutist and who feels that the real beast is within them is brutally hacked to death; 'At once the crowd surged after it, poured down the rock, leapt on to the beast, screamed, struck, bit, tore. There were no words, and no movements but the tearing of teeth and claws' (188). The shelter is demolished, the conch broken and Piggy, the sanest of all the boys, is killed in cold blood for raising his voice against the spurt of anarchical orgy :

> The rock struck Piggy a glancing blow from chin to knee; the conch exploded into a thousand fragments and ceased to exist. Piggy saying nothing, with no time even for a grunt, travelled through the air sideways from the rock, turning over as he went. The rock bounded twice and was lost in the forest. Piggy fell forty feet and landed on his back across the square, red rock in the sea. His head opened and stuff came out and turned red. Piggy's arms and legs twitched a bit, like a Pig's after it has been killed (222-223).

The hunters of Pig now turn into man-hunters. In order to hunt down Ralph, the lone survivor among the 'civilized' boys, Roger starts sharpening a stick at both ends. The forest is set on fire to ferret Ralph out of his hiding. Chased by the hunters he runs for his life. When finally he is miraculously saved by a naval officer, he weeps 'for the end of innocence, the darkness of man's heart, and the fall through the air of the true, wise friend called Piggy' (248).

3.3 : THE THEME

Lord of the Files *is an inverted re-writing of R.M. Ballantyne's* romantic adventure story *The Coral Island* (1857). In Ballantyne's novel the British boys are 'superior' — they are capable of mastering even an adverse situation. The seed of Ballantyne's romantic thesis may be traced to Godwin's *Political Justice* (1793) in which man has been envisaged as 'perfectible and capable of continuous improvement'. In Golding's novel the British boys who happen to crash-land on an idyllic island fast degenerate into a barbaric state not, however, under any compulsion. They wilfully resign to their innate predatory instinct crying for dominance. It is to be noted that here the horrible spectacle of human degradation has not been presented through the vicious career of an adult as in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness.* The characters of Golding's novels are all children who are traditionally believed to be innocent and pure. The novel, thus, on the one hand subverts the Godwinian postulate about human goodness glamorized in Ballantyne, on the other it explodes the Romantic myth that 'Heaven lies about us in our infancy.' It has been pointed out that Golding's central argument that even children are naturally wicked and sinful is itself a Romantic proposition. While Christianity looks upon Childhood as a state divine ('Gentle Jesus, meek and mild/He became a little child'), psychologists also talk about the impeccability of children whose minds get infected with all that is foul through social intercourse. Yet Golding's version of juvenile psyche is not unrealistic. He contends that children have an enormous capacity for destruction, violence and wickedness. He refers to the confession of St. Augustine about pushing his twin brother away from his mother's breast as the Christian example of 'potential savagery' of children. As for psychological convincingness, an eminent American psychiatrist Antony Storr has wondered whether before writing *Lord of the Flies* Golding ever read the findings of an experiment with child psychology carried on by American doctors. The doctors who allowed two groups of boys to act according to their will 'had to intervene before murder was done'.

3.4 : ENDING

The ending of *Lord of the Flies* is an issue of critical controversy. Prof. Gindin describes the intervention of the naval officer leading to the rescue of Ralph and the other surviving boys as a mere 'gimmick'. It is indeed a bit odd that a novel presenting a grim spectacle of chronic diabolism in human nature abruptly makes a U-turn at the end. But it would be unwise to claim that the novel ends happily. Ralph no doubt is saved, but the adult world where he finds his refuge is equally vicious. It is no world of peace and tolerance but a world of rivalry, hatred and mass

destruction. This is evident from the reference to the nuclear warfare at the beginning and also from the revolver and the sub-machine gun held by the rescuers. The rescue is, therefore, no rescue but a fall from the frying pan into the fire — the ultimate triumph of evil.

3.5 : TITLE

The title '*Lord of the Flies*' refers to Beelzebub, who was next only to Satan 'in power and next in crime' (*Paradise Lost* BK I, 179). One of the 'local manifestations' of the Philistine Sun-God Baal, Beelzebub is known as the 'lord of the flies' because his chief oracle is at Ekron where 'answers seem to have been obtained from the hum and motions of flies'. In *Doctor Faustus* Lucifer introduces Beelzebub to Faustus as 'my companion prince in hell'. So Beelzebab, the lord of flies, is evil incarnate. Golding chooses the nickname of a notorious false god as the title of his novel because the novel demonstrates the innate propensity to evil in children who have been traditionally supposed to represent seraphic innocence.

The stranded boys of the island live in terror of an imaginary beast from water or air. Nobody has seen it, yet many of them believe that it exists, Jack the hunter kills a pig and leaves 'part of the kill' in order to propitiate the beast supposed to be haunting them in the darkness of the night. The dim-eyed, grinning Pig's head fixed upon a stick with 'buzzing flies over the spilled gut' is an external symbol of evil. At the physical level it is the '*lord of the flies*' suggested by the title.

But Simon, the visionary, refuses from the beginning to admit that the beast is something external. 'May be it's only us' is his suggestion. When he sets out to explore the truth, he first comes across the fly-haunted pig-head in the forest. Simon recognizes it as what it is, not as the lord of the flies. For this quest for truth he is 'not wanted' in this evil world : 'Simon found he was looking into a vast mouth. There was blackness within, a blackness that spread' (178). Afterwards when he reaches the mountain-top, Simon sees the corpse of the dead parachutist hanging over the rocks. It too is a false symbol of evil, it too is only outwardly the lord of the flies :

> The flies had found the figure too. The life like movement would scare them off for a moment so that they made a dark cloud round the head. Then as the blue material of the parachute collapsed, the corpulent figure would bow forward, sighing, and the flies settled once more (181).

Having freed the lines from the rocks and the figure from the wind's indignity,

Simon the quester starts down the mountain to share his knowledge with the other boys but gets killed by his frenzied mates impatient to kill, cut and spill the blood.

So 'Lord of the flies' really signifies the germ of evil that all man carries within. It is only when man becomes blind to his own nature that he traces evil to all those totems and false symbols like the pig's head or the rotting corpse. The title of Golding's novel is thus apt and justified.

3.6 : SAMPLE QUESTIONS

1. Critically analyze the theme of *Lord of the Flies.* Is Golding a realist or a pessimist ?
2. Discuss the significance of the title of *Lord of the Flies.*

3.7 : RECOMMENDED READING

Gindin, James : *Post-War British Fiction*

Kinkead-Weekes, Mark & Gregor, Ian : *William Golding : A Critical Study.*

3.8 : GLOSSARY

Theme/Subject As used in literary criticism, *theme* stands for the idea or message implicit in a text. It is often distinguished from *subject* which signifies the matter or topic described or dealt with. For example, the pole star is the *subject* of Keats' sonnet *Bright Star.* Its *theme,* however, is that the ideal state always includes opposites like the moving and the motionless.

UNIT - IV : THE CHARACTERS

4.0 : Objectives
4.1 : Introduction
4.2 : Ralph
4.3 : Piggy
4.4 : Jack
4.5 : Simon
4.6 : Other Characters
4.7 : Glossary
4.8 : Sample Questions
4.9 : Recommended Reading

4.0 : OBJECTIVES

The aim of this unit is to study the main characters of *Lord of the Flies* with special emphasis on how through their actions they embody the theme of the novel.

4.1 : INTRODUCTION

A character is a figure in a literary work endowed with certain qualities that are expressed through what (s)he says and/or what (s)he does. Characterization is the art of sketching characters in an aesthetically convincing style. In a novel a character may be presented descriptively with the narrator 'telling' the reader what sort of person the character really is. It may also be presented dramatically with the author "showing" his characters, that is, revealing their traits without elucidatory comments or interpretive remarks.

Plot is uttered in the same breath with character. Henry James once wittily summed up the interdependence of these two critical concepts : 'What is character but the determination of incident ? What is incident but the illustration of character ?' Yet in pre-20th century novel most authors were more interested in plot-construction than in characterization. Not that the characters in the novels of this period are all pale faces lacking in depth. Many are complex and psychologically most challenging. Yet the novelists of the time more or less focused on the social self of the characters. The awareness that the mind of man is a three-tier structure a large portion of which lies really submerged, led to the subordination of plot-construction

to characterization in post-Freudian fiction. As a painter of characters Golding too consistently tries to reveal the inner self of his characters though he mostly eschews the more intricate methods like the stream of consciousness technique used by Joyce and Woolf. It is often argued that in his novels Golding fails to explore the complexity of human nature. Though *Lord of the Flies* places its characters in 'extreme situations' cut off from social perspective, an analysis of the characters of the novel bears out the depth and finesse of his characterization.

4.2 : RALPH

Ralph, the boy with 'fair hair' is the 'eye' of the novel. The novel opens with an account of Ralph picking his way towards the lagoon and ends with Ralph shuddering at human contact or weeping for the end of innocence. He represents the civilized forces but there are moments when he too involuntarily resigns to the irresistible temptation of forocity. In the unknown island Ralph at first is excited to be free from the clutches of the adult world. But gradually the insecurity of this free life dawns upon his mind. He is not born to command like jack. But when elected the leader of the group, he evinces considerable sense of responsibility : 'We shall have to look after ourselves'. He suggests that they must arrange for the signal smoke on the mountain top and raise shelters for protection at night. He lacks Piggy's intelligence but is not without common sense as in evident from his remark 'You wouldn't have a beast, a snake-thing, in an island of this size.' The rivalry between Ralph and Jack is suggestive of virtue at war with vice. Ralph is not a coward. When things starts falling apart, he shows the boldness of pulling up Jack for neglecting the fire and the shelter and also for sneaking like a thief to steal Piggy's spectacles. Ralph has not the moral fibre of goodness that can be traced to the character of Simon. He betrays Piggy's confidence by leaking out his embarrassing nickname to others. When the hunters raid the shelters for Piggy's glasses, Ralph, mistaking them for the terrible beast, wishes that the beast should prefer the 'littluns'. During mock hunting, Ralph too fights 'to get near, to get a handful of that vulnerable flesh' (142) of Robert. All this is but human frailty. Ralph otherwise is sufficiently civilized and has remarkable control over his instinctual drives. He is conscientious and apologizes to Piggy for betraying his trust. It is therefore difficult to agree with Prof. Peter that Ralph's duties as a leader 'save him rather than any intrinsic virtue in himself.'

Ralph remains the focus, the rallying point of everything that is precious and desirable. The story also shows Ralph's progressive alienation. It is through his experience that the 'darkness' of the human heart has been projected.

4.3 : PIGGY

The fat, asthmatic boy Piggy is almost an outsider among the group of boys. Myopic since three, he wears specs and is unused to strenuous physical exertion : 'I can't swim. I wasn't allowed. My asthma' (19). But Piggy is adequately rational and is the most sagacious of all the boys.

Piggy identifies the shell as conch and suggests how it can be used to organize the boys scattered over the island. : "We can use this to call the others. Have a meeting" (22). He feels the need of recording the names of the little boys and snubs all for sporting with fire 'acting like a crowd of kids'. For his patience, foresight and wisdom Piggy is accepted as a parent figure. The littluns are left under his care, and when the other boys behave rashly he has the 'martyred expression of a parent who has to keep up with the senseless ebullience of the children' (50). Piggy can explain things rationally. It is he who sees that it would be impossible for them to manage everything without the help of the grown-ups : 'Grown-ups know things....Then things 'ud be all right'. When everybody speaks about the terrible beast haunting the island at night, Piggy replies with common sense : 'How could there be ? What would a beast eat?' What would a beast eat? Again, it is Piggy who suggests that the fire should be shifted from the mountain-top to the beach. But he has also the limitations of his class. When Simon is murdered, Piggy rationalizes his murder as an 'accident' and shirks his responsibility. Throughout the novel Piggy supports Ralph and tries to resist the spread of evil : 'If Jack was chief, he'd have all hunting and no fire'. But on the island where thought is not valued, as Prof. Hynes rightly points out, 'he is ineffectual,'. No wonder that the final triumph of evil is suggested through the death of Piggy.

4.4 : JACK

The tall 'red-haired' boy. embodies all those evil forces that undermine the order which sustains a society. Egocentric and authoritarian, Jack hates rules and discipline because that won't allow him to be self-willed. Born not to obey but to command, he claims that he 'ought to be chief' of the boys as he is the chapter chorister and head boy. When Ralph is elected chief of the boys, he feels piqued and tries to subvert the system that Ralph and Piggy try to introduce in the island. He flouts the Conch-rule : 'the conch does not count on top of the mountain' (54). He instigates everybody to defy Ralph's authority as chief : 'Who are you anyway? Sitting there and telling people what to do. You can't hunt, you can't sing'.

Jack represents irresponsible authority. Hunting is his priority : 'Rescue? I'd like to catch pig first'. He is not ashamed that it is due to his negligence that the fire is out and a chance of rescue is lost. He steals the fire from Ralph's camp, snatches Piggy's spectacles, promotes among the boys the killer instinct of which Simon is an innocent victim. The human agent of the Lord of the Flies, Jack is beast-like in appearance and attitude. Golding carefully conceals his human qualities and highlights those which he has in common with sub-human creatures :

> ... for a minutes (he) became less a hunter than a furtive thing, ape-like among the tangle of trees (62)

Or

> Jack was bent double... his nose only a few inches from the humid earth...Then dog-like, uncomfortably on all fours yet unheeding his discomfort, he stole forward five yards and stopped (61)

Yet it seems that Jack slips into savagery because in the island the social restrictions do not count. Besides, the mask of paint hides his social identity and gives him a a scope to run amuck :

> ... the mask was a thing on its own, behind which Jack hid, liberated from shame and self-consciousness (80).

It is interesting to note that all Jack's motions are associated with violence. He *smacks* Piggy on the head, *stabs* the air with his spear and uses his knife to *slash* a tree, Jack is the only character in the novel who uses 'kill' intransivitely. Who is killed is immaterial to him, for kill he must.

Jack stands as the rallying point of the forces of savagery, atavism. His quickly growing authority serves to project the author's pessimistic view regarding the Power of evil.

4.5 : SIMON

What makes the skinny boy Simon 'alien' in the group of boys is his insight and his visionary power. In the original version Simon was a much more overtly saintified character — a sacrificial victim, a 'Christ figure', Golding tells us. It was Golding's publishers who persuaded the author to simplify Simon and the result is a shy, epileptic visionary with an intuitive sense of real human nature. In a novel dwelling upon the innate diabolism of man, Simon apparently strikes one as an 'outsider'. But in answer to a question about the psychological convincingness of

the character Golding once observed that since the colour of original evil outshines that of original good, 'to make something of the same dominant colour as man's evil, you have to have not innate goodness so much as a kind of holiness or sanctity, you have to raise good to a higher level'. This explains the otherness of Simon in the world of the savage-civilized. Simon is gifted with prophetic insight. 'You'll get back to where you came from', he assures Ralph. He is the only boy who from the beginning has the hunch that the real beast is 'only us'. Simon realizes that it is the bogey of an external evil that prevents man from self-exploration and thereby knowing his own nature. And the less introspective man grows, the better is the chance of evil to thrive and preponderate. Simon who is generous enough to find fruit for the littluns and offer his share of meat to Piggy wants to rid all his mates of their mistakes about the beast. With a seer's zeal for truth, he sets about to explore the mystery about the beast.

Simon's delirious dialogue with the pig's head standing as an emblem of the 'infinite cynicism of adult life' (120) confirms the infallibility of his intuition : 'I am the reason why it's no go? Why things are what they are ?' (177). Though evil wants its design to be secret, though the lord of the flies gets 'waxy' at his quest for truth, Simon staggers on to the top of the mountain. There he finds the farce about the supposed beast — the rotting body of the parachutist rising and falling with the blowing of wind. Releasing the strings of the parachute from the tangle of creepers he frees the figure from the 'wind's indignity'. But when he comes to the beach to share his knowledge with the other boys, they take him as a beast-substitute and hack him to death. After his death Simon's mutilated body is washed away from the shore by the spring tide :

> The water rose further and dressed Simon's coarse hair with brightness. The line of his cheek silvered and the turn of his shoulder became sculptured marble ... The great wave of the tide moved further along the island and the water lifted. Softly, surrounded by a fringe of inquisitive bright creatures, itself a silver shape beneath the steadfast constellations, Simon's dead body moved out towards the open sea (190)

Golding hints at the transformation of Simon not to 'mystify' his character, as it has been alleged. He rather wants us to feel that the death of Simon, a martyr to human folly, is not so much his own loss. He no doubt dies (and who is immortal!) but the island boys lose their saviour. By offering the pig's head to the beast Jack just treats the symptom, not the disease. It is Simon who ventures to know the truth and communicate it to others. Sinful as they are, the boys turn a

deaf ear to his admonitions and call him 'cracked', 'queer and funny'. It is interesting to note that to be labelled as 'crank' has been the natural fate of all true visionaries. Simon is no exception.

4.6 : OTHER CHARACTERS

Characters like Maurice, Percival and Henry move on the periphery. Of these the 'littluns', the unnamed little ones, have not been individualized. Sam and Eric, together referred to as 'Samneric', speak antiphonally and have not been distinguished individually. 'They were the twins on duty at fire. In theory one should have been asleep and one on watch. But they could never manage to do things sensibly if that meant acting independently, and since staying awake all night was impossible, they had both gone to sleep' (119). Of the minor characters only Roger stands apart. In malevolence, capacity for mischief and violence, he is even more cruel than Jack. He sadistically tramples down the sand castles of the 'littluns' and throws stones at one of them, though not hitting directly. Subsequently, as the cruel urges in his nature prevail over his acquired habit, he levers a huge chunk of rock from the Castle Rock that kills Piggy at one blow. Towards the end of the novel it is Roger who emerges as 'a kind of Hitler figure'. Golding's own words are worth quoting in this context :

> Jack has got all the gallant elements — hunting, warrior instincts ... He is not really bad. He is a man of anger, violence and action and wants to be a leader. But the Hitler figure is emerging and he is Roger. He just comes to the surface by the time the book ends.

All the boys dread his nature. When after Piggy's death Ralph goes to the twins with the proposal of jointly resisting the force of anarchy, Sam says in a strangled voice : 'you don't know Roger. He's a terror' (233).

4.7 : SAMPLE QUESTIONS

1. Analyse the characters of Ralph/Piggy/Jack/Simon in *Lord of the Flies.*
2. Compare and contrast the characters of Ralph and Jack.
3. 'Roger in *Lord of the Flies* is the emerging Hitler figure' Justify.

4.8 : RECOMMENDED READING

Hynes, Samuel : *Six contemporary British Novelists.*

Page, Norman, ed : *William Golding : Novels, 1954-67*

Booth, Wayne C. : *The Rhetoric of Fiction*

4.9 : GLOSSARY

Telling/Showing : Two critical terms often used antithetically in modern fiction criticism. In *telling* method of narration, the novelist intrudes into the art world and sets out to judge and comment on the motives, purpose and intentions of his characters. In *showing* method, the author introduces the characters in the manner of the dramatist and leaves it to the reader to make inference in these matters without the author's guidance. Though the former is often considered inferior, many a great novelist has produced fictional masterpieces using the *telling* method of narration.

Stream of Consciousness : A modern narrative art which seeks to capture the flow of thoughts and reflections that constitute a character's consciousness. The method gained currency in England early in the 20th century. In order to reproduce the current of thoughts along with random associations, authors often neglect plot-construction and set aside chronological order of events. Two of its major English exponents are James Joyce and Virginia Woolf.

UNIT V : THE STRUCTURE AND THE NARRATIVE STYLE

5.0 : Objectives
5.1 : Introduction
5.2 : Fable
5.3 : Myth
5.4 : Narrative Art
5.5 : Imagery
5.6 : Irony
5.7 : Glossary
5.8 : Sample Questions
5.9 : Recommended Reading

5.0 : OBJECTIVES

The objective of this unit is to explain to the students the structure of *Lord of the Flies* and also the prominent narrative devices used in the novel.

5.1 : INTRODUCTION

The form of a work of art, strictly speaking, is inseparable from its content. Yet for convenience's sake, they are often studied separately. As a novelist Golding, unlike Joyce, is concerned more with what to say than with how to say it. The chronological progression of the story of *Lord of the Flies* and the absence of structural complexity in the form of multiple sub-plots, testify to the truth of this conclusion. Yet as a modern novelist Golding has paid adequate attention to the narratological aspects of his tale. This is evident as much from an analysis of the structure of the novel as from the technical devices like the use of imagery, irony etc.

5.2 : FABLE

One intriguing question about the form of *Lord of the Flies* is whether it is a fable or a fiction. John Peter draws the distinction between the two in the following words :

> Fables are those narratives which leave the impression that their purpose was anterior, that they were preceded by the conclusion which it is their function to draw ... The effect of a fiction is different. (Here) conclusions ...

do not appear to be anterior but on the contrary take their origin from the fiction itself, in which they are latent, and occasionally unrecognize.

In short, while in a fiction the proposition is one with the tale, in a fable it can be extracted without damaging the tale, for their relationship is non-organic. The distinction would be clear enough if one keeps in mind the distinction between a good fable, that is, an aesthetically satisfying one, and a bad fable, one which is devoid of any literary value whatsoever : 'A bad fable has a moral; a good fable is a moral.'

Angus Wilson claims that Golding's early works like *Lord of the Flies* are mere fables because Golding here has failed to find a literary analogue of his 'sense of a transcendent evil and good'. The central thesis of the novel is that order imposed from without is temporary and man's irrationality and urge for destruction are enduring. The presentation of this idea, it has been alleged, is so flawed that one often feels that Golding is not fleshing out an idea as happens in literature but just amplifying a thesis.

But any unbiased approach to the novel is bound to reveal that the entire story is not 'reducible to a moral proposition' as in a fable. Golding has amply fictionalized whatever idea he started with. First, the language used is metaphorical : 'They (Ralph and Jack) walked along, two *continents* of experience and feeling, unable to communicate,' (70); 'Before these fantastically attractive flowers of violet and red and yellow, unkindness *melted* away' (92); 'soon the darkness was full of *claws,* full of the awful unknown and menace' (123). Second, the characters drawn have all the complexity of human nature. For example, Ralph who represents the forces of civilization, can, during mock-hunting, hardly resist the urge to inflict pain. On the other hand, Jack who is ferocity personified, has to hide his face under the mask of paint to overcome the restraining power of civilized habits : 'They (Ralph and Piggy) understood only too well the liberation into savagery that the concealing paint brought' (212). Third, even the precept worked out in the novel, once fictionalized, ceases to be a mere precept with one well-defined message. This accounts for the plurisignificance of the text of *Lord of the Flies*. The novel may be read as a psychological allegory that shows how absence of legitimate repression leads to anarchy. It may also be interpreted as a political allegory highlighting the perils of rational democracy. Prof. Pritchett, for example, reads it as an allegory of a 'demented but partly secure' fascist society which creates an external image of evil, commits real evil in its name and executes everybody who like Simon sees where the shoe pinches. Golding himself is not against this reading of *Lord of the Flies* as a political allegory. For the novelist sees Roger as a Hitler-

figure : 'He just comes to the surface by the time the book ends. It is just the naval officer's stepping in which stops Roger from dominating the whole thing as Hitler dominated what was first a reaction party against communism'. Many others have again read the book as a religious allegory in which the doffing of the cross-marked robes by the choir boys stands for abdication of Christian virtues the culmination of which is the murder of Simon, the prophet figure. That the work can thus be interpreted in so many ways is proof enough that it is not a fable with a fixed moral but a fiction of profound human significance.

5.3 : MYTH

Golding once said that he would regard it 'a tremendous compliment' if somebody substitutes the word myth for fable as the framework of *Lord of the Flies.* Elucidating the point Golding maintained that a fable is 'an invented thing on the surface whereas myth is something more profound, its being key to existence...and experience as a whole'. Since myth is 'a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity', myth, as Eliot pointed out, can be used as an instrument for 'controlling ... ordering ... giving a shape and significance to the anarchy which is contemporary history'. One understands why *Lord of the Files* has been cast in the paradigm of the myth of the Fall of Man. The tropical island of the boys is paradise. That the boys are incapable of 'shedding unbearable blood' at the beginning of the novel is pre-lapsarian innocence. What follows next — the unbridled ferocity of which Simon and Piggy are the principal victims, is reminiscent of the fallen state of man with the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the garden of Eden. Ralph crying 'for the end of innocence' before the 'burning wreckage of the island' is, in the mythic framework, man pining for what he has lost for his own folly.

Prof. Elena Aleyeva mentions that principal among the many other mythological reminiscences which 'saturate the narrative tissue' of *Lord of the Flies* is 'the problem of power — its transition from one leader to another, which we find in different mythologies and which particularly reminds of the struggle for power among senior gods in Greek mythologies'. A central question of the novel is the question of leadership : Jack's self-styled leadership set aside by the electors, Ralph's authority disobeyed, the formation of a faction group by Jack who eventually emerges as the chief with final suggestions about transition of power from Jack to Roger : 'Roger edged past the Chief, only just avoiding pushing him with his shoulder' (224). All this convinces us that the novel may with equal justification be read in the light of the myth of struggle for power. The reference to the little boy Henry 'absorbed beyond mere happiness as he felt himself exercising control over

living things', (77) also fits into this framework. An interesting extension of this design is the pretension to British superiority as voiced by Jack early in the novel : 'I agree with Ralph. We've got to have rules and obey them. After all, we're not savages. We're English; and the English are best at everything. So we've got to do the right things' (55). In course of the novel this racial pride is more than compromised and the naval officer is shocked that a pack of British boys could not 'put up a better show'. While the novel punctures the myth of British superiority, the very attitude of the naval officer 'you're all British aren't you ?'— opens up the possibility of a post-colonial reading of the novel.

5.4 : THE NARRATIVE ART

'Piggy peered anxiously into the luminous veil that hung between him and the world'— this is how Golding describes the blurred vision of Piggy after the loss of his spectacles. 'Simplicity is a quality best understood as intellectual economy', observed Prof. Kermode with reference to Golding's narrative style in *Lord of the Flies.* Golding's prose here is so simple, so easy-flowing, so free from turgidity that his descriptive power often escapes the reader's attention. Consider the first incident of fire-making :

> Ralph elbowed him (Piggy) to one side and knelt by the pile.
>
> "Stand out of the light".
>
> There was pushing and pulling and officious cries.
>
> Ralph moved the lenses back and forth, this way and that, till a glossy white image of the declining sun lay on a piece of rotten wood. Almost at once a thin trickle of smoke rose up and made him cough. (53)

Again, as the fire spreads, the description is superb :

> As they watched, a flash of fire appeared at the root of one wisp, and then the smoke thickened. Small flames stirred at the bole of a tree and crawled away through leaves and brushwood, dividing and increasing. One patch touched a tree trunk and scrambled up like a bright squirrel. The smoke increased, sifted, rolled outwards. The squirrel leapt on the wings of the wind and clung to another standing tree, eating downwards. Beneath the dark canopy of leaves and smoke the fire laid hold on the forest and began to gnaw. Acres of black and yellow smoke rolled steadily towards the sea. (57)

How simple it is yet how vivid and powerful!

The most remarkable aspect of Golding's language is, however, that it is poetic

to the marrow. Similes such as the choir 'perched like blackbirds' or flames spread like 'a kind of wild life', and metaphors such as the 'breeze was a river of sparks' or 'he was a silent effigy of sorrow', account mainly for the poetic flavour of Golding's language.

5.5 : IMAGES AND SYMBOLS

An image is a 'verbal icon' which is often subject to sensory experience and which often evokes an idea and thus conditions the reader's response to the text. Since a wide range of thought can be conveyed suggestively through an image, perceptual or conceptual, use of images enables the writer to attain considerable economy of expression.

In *Lord of the Flies* one comes across a profusion of images which form a pattern. Small wonder that beast imagery should abound in a novel which explores human degeneration into bestiality. While hunting, Jack, 'dog-like', sniffs the ground with 'flared nostrils'; 'ape-like among the tangle of trees' he becomes 'less a hunter than a furtive thing'; 'wolf-like', Ralph gnaws at the almost raw meat thrown at him by Sam; he 'worms' into his 'night's lair' between the twisted stems. Verbs denoting animal-action like 'growling', 'prowling', 'squeaking' occur in plenty.

When the idea evoked by an image becomes one with it, when both go together and their association is integral, not accidental, the image appeals to us as a symbol. Darkness, which stands for evil is a major symbol in the novel. The boys, especially the littluns, are afraid of darkness which is 'full of claws, full of the awful unknown and menace' (123). The pig's head, spiked on a staff and blackened by files, is also associated with darkness : 'Simon found he was looking into a vast mouth. There was blackness within a blackness that spread' (178). While hiding in the forest at the fall of evening Ralph feels his isolation form the painted savages : 'Daylight might have answered yes; but darkness and the horrors of death said no. Lying there in the darkness, he knew he was an outcast' (238). Again, it is the recognition of 'darkness of man's heart', the irremovable stain of evil, that causes Ralph's tears at the end of the novel.

Smoke, unlike darkness, is a symbol of rescue from the clutches of barbarism. The fire producing smoke is lit, significantly enough, with Piggy's specs. Ralph insists on tending it, but Jack always neglects it. The 'deep cream' coloured conch, like the shelter is a symbol of order and civilization. The preponderance of evil is suggested as much through the death of Piggy as through the crumbling of the conch : 'The breaking of the conch and the deaths of Piggy and Simon lay over the island like a vapour. These painted savages would go further and further' (226).

5.6 : IRONY

Irony which exposes the disparity between appearance and reality, between the expectation and the turn-out, is, as a special mode of seeing things, a way of 'viewing existence'. Irony is often an effective weapon of the satirist and the writer of comedy. But serious works of art like *Macbeth* or *The Return of the Native* are also sometimes conceived ironically. Though irony is not the principal narrative device used in *Lord of the Flies,* no alert reader would miss the ironic overtones involved here which problematizes any definitive conclusion about the events narrated.

It is ironic that the boys twice support the claim of Ralph as the chief, yet most of them follow Jack the hunter. No less ironical is their pretension to racial/cultural superiority : 'After all, we're not savages. We're English ; and the English are best at everything. So we've got to the right things' (55). The novel, however, reveals the emptiness of this claim. The murder of Simon and Piggy, and other acts of violence and destruction prove that the boastings of racial superiority are boastings manque. Again, when the boys are 'all drifting and things are getting rotten' they feel the absence of grown-ups :

> 'grown-ups know things', said Piggy. 'They ain't afraid of the dark.
>
> They'd meet and have tea and discuss. Then things'ud be all right'. (117)

Ironically enough, the world of the grown-ups is a world tossed by atomic war where the life of the young is more insecure. Furthermore, driven mad by fear of the beast, the boys wish for an adult to appear before them and save them :

> If only they could get a message to us... If only they could send us
>
> something grown-up...a sign or something. (117)

At a time when they were thus expecting, a sign came down from the world of grown-ups, though at the time there was no child awake to read it' (118). The sign, ironically, is the parachutist who is 'dead but won't lie down'. Instead of ridding the children of the bogey of the beast the sign makes their fear more concrete and settled. But the irony of ironies is that it is not the signal-fire but the fire of destruction that ultimately saves the boys. Quite early in the novel, a ship sails away at a visible distance without rescuing them because the signal-fire, neglected by the boys, had ceased to burn. But at the end when the hunters set fire to the forest in order to burn Ralph alive or to ferret him out of his hiding, the huge smoke attracts a cruiser and the naval officer rescues them.

The ironic mode of presentation assures the reader that the author is not

committed to any single view, that he is aware of alternative possibilities or complementary attitudes. This awareness enhances the quality of the text by saving it from external irony i.e. the readers' scepticism about the conclusions presented in the text.

5.7 : SAMPLE QUESTIONS

1. *Lord of the Flies* is not a fable but fiction – Justify.
2. Write a short essay on the use of myth/irony in Golding's *Lord of the Flies.*
3. Critically analyze the significance of images and symbols in Golding's *Lord of the Flies.*

5.8 : RECOMMENDED READING

Peter, John. : 'The Fables of William Golding', Kenyan Review

Oldsey, B.S. & Weintraub, Stanley : *The Art of William Golding,* XIX, 4

5.9 : GLOSSARY

Myth : A popular story, often of primitive origin, that illustrates the early history of man or embodies an undying idea : e.g. the myth of Sisyphus, the myth of Behula.

Fable : A short tale designed to illustrate a moral lesson. Since the purpose of a fable is patently didactic, the precept in a fable is seldom presented under the conditions of art. The fables of Aesop are most popular among the beast fables.

Allegory : A literary genre with multiple correlated layers of meaning. The literal or the surface meaning is like a transparent mask and the underlying is the meaning 'intended'. The richer the text, the greater is the range of signification. Spenser's *Faerie Queene,* for example, may be read as a social / religious / political allegory.

Post Colonialism : A critical approach which questions the basic tenets of Eurocentric 'universalism' that the West is the best and the orient, the 'other', is culturally inferior. Post Colonial critics oppose uniformity which implies cultural hegemony of the colonizer over the colonized. They also draw critical attention to the difference and diversity of the colonial texts, that is, works produced outside Europe and America.

UNIT - VI : SELECT CRITICISM

6.0 : Objectives
6.1 : Introduction
6.2 : Allegory
6.3 : Narrative Art
6.4 : Fable
6.5 : Irony
6.6 : Ending
6.7 : Intertext
6.8 : Primitivism
6.9 : Myth

6.0 : OBJECTIVES

The objective of this unit is to provide you with select angles of interpretation. This will sharpen your critical faculty.

6.1 : INTRODUCTION

Anatole France defines literary criticism as 'the adventures of the soul among masterpieces'. According to D.H. Lawrence literary criticism is 'a reasoned account of the feeling' produced upon the critic by the book he is criticizing. Whatever be the definition, the function of criticism, to borrow Eliot's words, is to 'promote understanding and enjoyment of literature'. A large number of articles on *Lord of the Flies* have been published over the last fifty years. So, only representative portions of a select few essays having bearing on the present line of discussion have been cited here.

6.2 : ALLEGORY

Lord of the Flies is probably the most important novel to be published in this country in the 1950s. A story so explicitly symbolic as this might easily become fanciful and contrived, but Golding has mastered the art of writing a twentieth-century allegory. In contrast to the medieval audience, the general reading public today does not believe that correspondences exist between the material and spiritual world, and they do not automatically expect every incident or object to have symbolic

importance. No conventions of allegory exist, and the writer cannot introduce colours, animals, flowers or any of the other emblems which were available for the medieval writer...A modern audience will accept the underlying meanings only if they are conveyed in a completely convincing, true to life series of events.

To find an exciting, stimulating plot, which is both dramatically credible and capable of allegorical interpretation is exceptionally difficult. The idea of placing boys alone on an island, and letting them work out archetypal patterns of human society, is a brilliant technical device, with a simple coherence which is easily understood by a modern audience. Its success is due in part to the quality of Golding's Christianity. He is neither puritan nor transcendentalist, and his religious faith is based upon his interpretation of experience, rather than upon an unquestioning acceptance of revelation ...*Lord of the Flies* includes all these ingredients, but their exceptional force derives from Golding's faith that every detail of human life has a religious significance. This is one reason why he is unique among new writers in the 50s, and why he excels in narrative ability. Typical of the writers of the 50s is an uncertainty about human values, a fundamental doubt about whether life has any importance whatsoever. In contrast, Golding can describe friendship, guilt, pain and horror with a full sense of how deeply meaningful these can be for the individual. The terrible fire which kills the young children, the fear of Ralph as he is pursued across the island, and Piggy's fall to his death on the rocks make us feel, in their vivid detail, Golding's intense conviction that every particular of human life has a profound importance. His children are not juvenile delinquents, but human beings realizing for themselves the beauty and horror of life.... The island itself is boatshaped and the children typify all mankind in their journey through life... The surprising twist of events at the end of the novel is a highly original device to force upon us a new view point. The crazy, sadistic chase to kill Ralph is suddenly revealed to be the work of a semi-circle of little boys, their bodies streaked with coloured clay. But the irony is also directed at the naval officer, who comes to rescue them. His trim cruiser, the sub-machine gun, his white drill, epaulettes, revolver and row of gilt buttons, are only more sophisticated substitutes for the war-paint and sticks of Jack and his followers. He too is chasing men in order to kill, and the dirty children mock the absurd civilized attempt to hide the power of evil. And so when Ralph weeps for the end of innocence, the darkness of man's heart, and the death of his true, wise friend, Piggy, he weeps for all the human race.

From 'On *Lord of the Flies*', C.B.Cox

Critical Quarterly, 1960

6.3 : THE NARRATIVE ART

What distinguishes *Lord of the Flies* is its powerful and exciting qualities as narrative, and its appearance of extreme clarity of meaning; the later works are more difficult both to read and to understand. *Lord of the Flies* fulfils most effectively the novelist's basic task of telling a good story. It also meets Conrad's prescription : 'by the power of the written word to make you hear, to make you feel... before all, to make you *see*'. It was not surprising that it should have attracted the attention of the film director, providing him with an unwavering narrative drive, and also with an unbroken series of intensely visualized scenes. On the other hand, at every point and with a kind of inevitability that is as impressive as the story itself, we are made aware that much more than this story is being told; indeed a clearly focused and coherent body of meaning appears to be crystallizing out of every episode. A reader can feel that he possesses this novel in an unusually comprehensive way, and that he could give a lucid, even conceptual account of it. The book has high polish, and seems to present itself for our contemplation as a remarkably complete and solid structure. This of course may not always be regarded as a strength. Many readers may feel the book to be too crystalline, too insistent, too manipulated to be acceptable, but is seems likely that it is this combination of narrative momentum and thematic clarity that explains the popular success, which grater Golding novels have failed to achieve. Whether the art is so clear and crystalline, however, is perhaps open to question.

Let us consider the finding of the shell, which provides the title for the opening chapter. We watch the conch, we might say liberated from ordinariness, grasped, filled with meaning ... The whole rhythm of this seems one of transformation— the unliving thing is disentangled and given a new social purpose. It announces man and summons men together, this "Sound of the Shell". As the novel proceeds this meaning becomes more and more sharply defined. "We can use this to call the others. Have a meeting...". It is his association with the shell rather than his size or attractiveness that makes the children choose Ralph as their leader; and having been established as the symbol of assembly, the conch becomes identified with its procedure, with democracy and the right to free speech. It becomes a symbol of immense suggestiveness. Every time a boy cries "I've got the conch", he is drawing on the funds of order and democratic security. We take the point when Jack blows it "inexpertly", and when he lays it at his feet in rejection. The conch helps both to trace the trajectory of plot, and to establish character. Nowhere does Piggy's role seem more economically and poignantly expressed than when he prepares to confront the Tribe and its Chief with "the one thing he hasn't got". Then

the conch in Piggy's hands becomes no less than the basic challenge to the Tribe to choose between democracy and anarchy, civilization and savagery. The answer comes in unequivocal terms : "The rock struck Piggy a glancing blow from chin to knee; the conch exploded in to a thousand white fragments and ceased to exist." The shell, whose sound began as a summons to society, ends as a murderous explosion on the rocks. It traces out for us the swift tragic progress of the tale, and condenses its meaning— or so it seems.

From *William Golding : Lord of the Flies; A Critical Study,*
by Mark Kinkead-Weekes and Ian Gregor

6.4 : FABLE

The intentness with which this thesis is developed leaves no doubt that the novel is a fable, a deliberate translation of a proposition into the dramatized terms of art, and as usual we have to ask ourselves how resourceful and complete the translation has been, how fully the thesis has been absorbed and rendered implicit in the tale as it is told. A writer of fables will heat his story at the fire of his conviction, but when he has finished, the story must glow apart, generating its own heat from within. Golding himself provides a criterion for judgment here, for he offers a striking example of how complete the translation of a statement into plastic terms can be. Soon after their arrival the children develop an irrational suspicion that there is a predatory beast at large on the island. This has of course no real existence, as Piggy for one points out, but to the littluns it is almost as tangible as their castles in the sand, and most of the older boys are afraid they may be right. One night when all are sleeping there is an air battle ten miles above the sea and a parachuted man, already dead, comes drifting down through the darkness, to settle among the rocks that crown the island's only mountain. There the corpse lies unnoticed, rising and falling with the gusts of the wind, its harness snagged on the bushes and its parachute distending and collapsing. When it is discovered and the frightened boys mistake it for the beast the sequence is natural and convincing, yet the implicit statement is quite unmistakable too. The incomprehensible thereat which has hung over them, is so to speak, identified and explained : a nameless figure who is man himself, the boys' own natures, the something that all humans have in common.

This is finely done and needs no further comment, but unhappily the explicit comment has already been provided, in Simon's halting explanation of the beast's identity : "What I mean is ... may be it's only us". And a little later we are told that "However Simon thought of the beast, there rose before his inward sight the picture

of a human at once heroic and sick". This over-explicitness is my main criticism of what is in many ways a work of real distinction, & for two reasons it appears to be a serious one. In the first place the fault is precisely that which any fable is likely to incur : the incomplete translation of its thesis into its story so that much remains external & extrinsic, the teller's assertion rather than the tale's enactment before our eyes. In the second place the fault is persistent one, and cannot easily be discounted or ignored.

From 'The Fables of William Golding',

by John Peter

The Kenyan Review, XIX, No. 4

6.5 : IRONY

In discussing the actions of *Lord of the Flies* I have again and again slipped from talking about boys to describing the characters as men, or simply as human beings. It is true that as the action rises to its crises — to the *agon* of chapter 5, Simon's confrontation with the beast, the murders, the final hunt — we cease to respond to the story as a story about children, and see them simply as people, engaged in desperate, destructive actions. Consequently, Golding can achieve a highly dramatic effect at the end of the book by bringing our eyes down, with Ralph's to a beach-level view of an adult, and then swinging round, to show us Ralph from the adult's point of view. The result is an irony that makes two points. First, we see with sudden clarity that these murderous savages were civilized children; the point is not, I take it, that children are more horrid than we thought (though they are), but rather that the human propensity for evil knows no limits, not even limits of age, and that there is no Age of Innocence (Ralph weeps for the end of innocence, but when did it exist, except as an illusion made of his own ignorance ?) Second, there is the adult, large, efficient, confident— the "grown-up" that the children have wished for all along. But his words show at once that he is a large, stupid *Coral island* mentality in a peaked cap, entirely blind to the moral realities of the situation. He may save Ralph's life, but he will not understand. And once he has gathered up castaways, he will return to his ship, and the grown-up business of hunting men (just as the boys have been hunting Ralph). "And who," asks Golding, "will rescue the adult and his cruiser ?"

From 'William Golding,'

Six Contemporary British Novelists, Samuel Hynes

6.6 : THE ENDING

The metaphors (of Golding's novels) are intensive, far-reaching; they permeate all the details and events of the novels. Yet at the end of each novel the metaphors, unique and striking as they are, turn into "gimmicks", into clever tricks that shift the focus or the emphasis of the novel as a whole. And, in each instance, the "gimmick" seems to work against the novel, to contradict or to limit the range of reference and meaning that Golding has already established metaphorically... Golding's first novel, *Lord of the Flies*, tells the story of a group of English schoolboys, between the ages of six and twelve, who survive a plane crash on a tropical island....

But the metaphor of the society the boys construct is not left to do its work alone. Just when the savage forces led by Jack are tracking down Ralph and burning the whole island to find him, a British naval officer arrives to rescue the boys. Ironically, the smoke of barbaric fury, not the smoke of conscious effort, has led to rescue...But the rescue is ultimately a "gimmick" a trick, a means of cutting down or softening the implications built up within the structure of the boys' society on the island...In each novel the final "gimmick" provides a twist in it, in one way or another, palliates the force and the unity of the original metaphor. In each instance Golding seems to be backing down from the implications of the metaphor itself, never really contradicting the metaphor, but adding a twist that makes the mataphor less sure, less permanently applicable...

The "gimmicks supply a wider perspective that makes each of the following questions relevant : If the adult world rescues the boys in *Lord of the Flies,* are the depravity and the brutality of human nature so complete ? ... All these relevant questions are implicit in the "gimmicks" Golding uses, "gimmicks" that qualify the universality of the metaphors, question the pretense that the metaphors contain complete truth. But this qualification is achieved at the expense of artistic form, for the reader to regard the issues somewhat more superficially even though they widen the range of suggestion. The "gimmicks" are ultimately unsatisfactory modifiers, for in the kind of qualification they provide, they reduce the issues of the novels to a simpler and trickier plane of experience.

From *Post-War British Fiction : New Accents and Attitudes.*

JamesGindin

6.7 : INTERTEXTUALITY

In spite his exasperation with the so called 'intertextualist' reading of *Lord of the Flies* McEwan...makes a vital point : that Ballantyne 'wrote a different sort of

book'; Golding is aware of the fact no less than his critic. Here he writes 'back' to Ballantyne much in the same way as many post colonial writers have been writing 'back' to canonical British texts since the sixties, or feminist writers to canonical 'patriarchal' texts. And it is from the '*difference*' between the two texts that significances emerge and meaning explodes. ....Again, it is but a common feature of intertextual re-writing that it should express an attitude to, or opinion of the parent-text. This can be admiration or rejection or critical acceptance or revision. It could even be parodic towards the *ur*-text. But usually it explores the generator text, not so much to mock it as to use it for a premise to probe new possibilities of response. It does not intend to disrespect but can seek to disturb a conventional attitude. And, whatever be the attitude, intertextuality depends heavily on revealing its source, instead of hiding it (like plagiarism), for its specific end. This what Golding does in *Lord of the Flies*. He registers an anguished perception of his own times, for which he uses a nineteenth culture model as a frame, and he takes care to reveal his source early in the narration. The many evocatives allusions and echoes interspersed in the text from the beginning till the end, invite and challenge the reader to identify the source and consider their relevances in the new context. As there are overt differences, there are also countless intrusions of one novel between the lines of the other. Indeed, Golding 'seems to have intended the reader to take into account the way in which one book uses the other'... Ballantyne's boys could do both hunting and fire-making, shelter-building in perfect disciplined way, automatically accepting Jack 'the wisest' and 'boldest' 'hard-working' as their leader, and getting themselves 'into a very comfortable condition' with their self-improvised weapons and equipment...But Golding's boys, though many more in number, do not do the right things; instead they soon split up on the issue of fire-making or hunting, rescue or pleasure, foresight or present fun...Initial efforts at order disappear soon; shelters remain incomplete; signal fire goes out with the first success at pig-killing; intelligence and reason lose appeal and senseless taboos and rites take over ... So, at the end when the naval officer stirs up the forgotten illusion of textuality once again, his jolly impercipience seems only too ironical ...

'We were together then—'

The officer nodded helpfully.

'I know jolly good show. Like *The Coral Island*

The un-"like" ness is so stunning that Ralph can only look at him "dumbly". The difference has been indeed so great, so shocking and traumatic its revelation has been! So long the boy had been running for life and had no chance for taking stock of the revelation. Now the mention of the other text makes him recognize with

horror the difference of his own scorched, mangled text, the text that real life has written for him in horrible letters of blood, fire and stones on the once lush green and crystal blue pages of this other "Coral Island", and waves of "great shuddering spasms of grief" overwhelm him... Whereas at the end of *The Coral Island* the three heroes return to civilization— obviously meaning Europe— wiser, maturer, they tear themselves with difficulty from the dear island— "When the quivering lips pronounce the word— 'Fare well' (190), in *Lord of the Flies* the land of the nightmarish memories is scorched. There is no one or nothing to bid 'Fare Well' to, and no sweet memory to carry home. Survival requires leaving it. Ralph is indeed wiser, but at what price!... Not only in theme, but in style too the two books are so appropriately different! One is linear, descriptive, realistic; the other is symbolic and mythic in minute detail— what with the island, a microcosm representing the world, the 'scar'-man's destructive force, the beast— the evil within, Piggy and his glasses-intelligence, Ralph and his conch-democracy, and so on.

From 'Like (!) The Coral Island; *Lord of the Flies* : A Study in Intertext', Rama Kundu

The Atlantic Critical Review, Vol 2, No. 2, 2003

6.8 : THE NEGATION OF PRIMITIVISM

The primitivist holds that if trappings of civilization could be cast off, man would shine with all his pre-lapsarian glory. True progress is, therefore, moving backwards, a reversion to the pre-civilized state, glamorized by Thoreau : 'We do not ride upon the railroad, the railroad rides upon us'. Admittedly, this primitivist postulate which J.A.Cuddon calls 'atavistic nostalgia', is basically romantic, for it on the one hand connives at the drawbacks of early life, on the other depreciates the positive aspects of human civilization. After all, it was the crisis of existence in the form of hunger, disease and external threat that compelled our ancestors to strive for a better life guaranteed, although neither flawlessly nor universally, by modern civilization ... William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* is a bold cancellation of the romantic primitivist thesis that the primal is ideal. It aesthetically justifies the point that the human civilization is worth retaining. Though the setting is beyond the pales of the civilized world, the characters are British boys. Yet they represent the primitive primarily because the civilized world in the novel is represented by the grown-ups. Besides, in their as yet not being fully tutored into adult complexity, in their preference for hunting, in their abhorrence of rules, they are worthy representatives of the primitive world. It is wrong to assume that in locating evil in the boys themselves Golding has re-energized the notion of Original Sin. He rather chooses a group of British

boys, not yet in their teens, to explode the Ballantynian myth about British supremacy, and, more significantly, to disprove the tenets of Chronological Primitivism. The proponents of Chronological Primitivism believe that as the past of human society is better than the present, so childhood, the 'past' of human life, is better than man hood; 'Heaven lies about us in our infancy'. Golding rather would agree with Claude Levi-Strauss that the untutored and the sophisticated have an identical psychic pattern. In the ultimate analysis Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness* and the boys in *Lord of the Flies* are the obverse and reverse of the same coin, for both end in horror. The psychic pattern that Golding explores in *Lord of Flies* is that man is naturally vicious, that evil lurks in every vein of man. It is opposite to the Noble Savage view of human life, which looks upon man as naturally moral and dignified...

'I believe that man suffers from an appalling ignorance of his own nature,' observed Golding in an interview. *Lord of the Flies* focuses on how horrible human nature really is, and this is a stronger justification for maintaining a well-organized rational society. Since man is basically Yahoo-natured, the primitive mode of life cannot be a worthier substitute for the civilized. Indeed resignation to the sub-rational is no solution for the damned human condition *Lord of the Flies* convinces us that human qualities like compassion and rationality 'can flourish only in the protected condition of civilized society'.

From *'Lord of the Flies :* A Critique of Primitivism',

Sukriti Ghosal

The Atlantic Critical Review, Vol 2, No. 2, 2003

6.9 : THE MYTHOLOGICAL MOTIF

Mythological reminiscences saturate the narrative tissue of *Lord of the Flies.* They manifest themselves through different motifs which date back to ancient myth. Such, for example, is the problem of power- its transition from one leader to another, which we find in different mythologies and which particularly reminds of the struggle for power among senior gods in Greek mythology...In ancient eschatological myths there usually acted two antagonists, one destroying and the other creating. Mostly these functions were performed by twins. Here, too, there are twins, but their mythological function is transferred to Ralph and Jack...Among the other mythological motifs we can also find a werewolf motif, which is embodied in the image of mask. A mask not only covers the face of a person but gives him a

feeling of absolute freedom from all that was constraining him before-conscience, duty, obligation,-all that has been developed by mankind in the process of evolution.

Doubtlessly, all these themes and motifs are present in the novel, but we should not limit the analysis to discovering mythic patterns as it simplifies to a great extent the world picture created by the author in his novel. As far as the author's opinion on the problem of influence is concerned, he assumes, that one work of art cannot come out of another.

From 'Mythological Motifs in *Lord of the Flies*',

Elena Aleyeva

The Atlantic Critical Review, Vol 2, No. 2, 2003.